North Carolina has been a national leader in developing innovative ways to minimize bycatch and protect stocks of juvenile fish, shrimp, shellfish and crabs in our sounds and estuaries. Traditionally ranked in the top-10 seafood producing states, North Carolina has over 4,000 miles of shoreline and 2.3 million acres of inside or estuarine waters - the largest estuarine system of any state on the east coast.

Listed below are some of the proactive measures that the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Division of Marine Fisheries have taken to ensure sustainable fisheries for the benefit of the people of North Carolina:

- ♦ In 1992, North Carolina was the first state to require the use of bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) in shrimp trawls. These devices allow juvenile or small fish to escape through openings in the trawl nets, while allowing fishermen to keep mature fish and shrimp.
- ◆ In 1998, the Marine Fisheries Commission required fishermen in inside waters to stay within 100 yards of gill nets less than 5 inch stretched mesh at all times, from May 1 through October 31 of each year, to protect stocks of red drum.
- ◆ In 1998, the Marine Fisheries Commission required all flounder pound nets to have escape panels which allow juvenile fish to escape, while allowing fishermen to keep mature fish (except waters east of the Alligator River in the Albemarle Sound).
- ◆ In 1998, the Marine Fisheries Commission required culling panels in long haul seines to allow juvenile fish to escape, while allowing fishermen to harvest mature fish.
- ◆ In 1997, the Marine Fisheries Commission prohibited the use of flynets, which are a type of trawl net, in the ocean waters south of Cape Hatteras to protect juvenile stocks of weakfish.
- ◆ In 1996, the Marine Fisheries Commission designated four areas as oyster sanctuaries, prohibiting trawling, bottom disturbing gears and shellfishing in order to protect the stock and produce spawning reserves.
- ♦ In 1989, North Carolina was the first state to require a 5½ inch tailbag in flounder trawls to allow undersized fish to escape.
- ◆In 1989, the Marine Fisheries Commission passed rules to require cull rings in crab pots, which allow undersized or small crabs to escape, while allowing fishermen to keep legal-sized crabs.
- ◆North Carolina does not allow trawling in approximately 200,000 acres of areas designated as **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation**. These vast grassbeds provide protection and also serve as nursery areas for fish, scallops, crabs and shrimp.
- ♦ At least 90% of North Carolina's economically important fisheries species spend at least part of their lives in the safety of our sounds and estuaries. The young animals find abundant food and shelter in the brackish marshes along the sounds. In 1977, North Carolina was the first state to designate waters as nursery areas in order to protect these fragile ecosystems. Today our nursery system serves as a model for other states with 147,000 acres of protected wetlands and marshes. There are three categories of nursery areas in our coastal waters:

Primary Nursery Areas are located in the upper portions of creeks and bays. To protect juveniles, many commercial fishing activities are prohibited in these waters; including the use of trawl nets, seine nets, dredges or any mechanical methods used for taking clams or oysters. If a violator is caught in a Primary Nursery Area, he is faced with a very substantial penalty. There are 80,144 acres designated as Primary Nursery Areas.

Secondary Nursery Areas are located in the lower portions of creeks and bays. As they develop and grow, young fish and shellfish, primarily blue crabs and shrimp, move into these waters. Trawling is not allowed in the Secondary Nursery Areas. There are 35,502 acres designated as Secondary Nursery Areas.

Special Secondary Nursery Areas are located adjacent to Secondary Nursery Areas but closer to the open waters of our sounds and the ocean. The majority of the year when juvenile species are abundant, these waters are closed to trawling. There are 31,362 acres designated as Special Secondary Nursery Areas.